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E.O. 12958: N/A  
TAGS: [PREL](#) [IS](#) [LE](#) [AG](#)  
SUBJECT: ALGERIAN REACTION TO EVENTS IN LEBANON  
UNCHARACTERISTICALLY STRONG

CRITICAL STATEMENT FROM MFA; REAFFIRMATION  
OF BEIRUT SUMMIT PRINCIPLES BY BOUTEFLIKA  
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11. (U) In an apparent effort to get out in front of an Algerian public furious over Israeli actions in Lebanon, the GOA adopted an unusually high-profile posture the past few days. The MFA issued a statement July 13 denouncing "the flagrant aggressions" perpetrated by Israeli military forces against Palestine and Lebanon, calling on the Quartet to bring Israel "to withdraw its forces, lift its blockade against the Palestinian people and Lebanese territory, and liberate Palestinians and Arabs detained in Israeli jails." The statement also stated that Algeria had never ceased to support the establishment of a Palestinian state with Jerusalem as its capital. The press reported July 15 that that Algeria's UN Mission had called for the Security Council to take action to halt Israel's attack on Lebanon. Earlier in the week (July 12) while on an official visit to London, President Bouteflika refrained from pointed criticisms in an address before the Arab ambassadors to the United Kingdom. He reaffirmed Algerian support for the peace plan adopted by the Arab League at its 2002 summit in Beirut, support for the roadmap, the return of Palestinian refugees, establishment of a Palestinian state with Jerusalem as its capital, and the recovery of Israeli-occupied areas in Syria and Lebanon.

HEAVY GOA HAND IN SERMONS AT FRIDAY PRAYERS  
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12. (U) The imams in Algerian mosques joined the chorus July 14, the likes of which has not occurred since April 2003 when U.S. troops were entering Baghdad, drawing on GOA-issued guidance for Friday sermons sharply critical of U.S. policy in the region. The guidance, to which imams across the country widely adhered, according to our contacts, condemned: the American veto in the UNSC of the resolution proposed by Qatar; Israel's "inhuman and cowardly" aggression; the silence of the Arab nation "which fails to stand as one single person"; and the Saudi position on Hizballah's actions against Israel. Based on a copy of the text circulated to all imams by the Ministry of Religious Affairs, the key portions of which were orally briefed to post by an imam contact, imams were instructed to say, "But we are used to the American double standard policy!" in conjunction with references to the Qatari UNSC resolution. In reference to Saudi Arabia's criticism of Hizballah actions, imams were to declare, "Hizballah has a right to exist!" Imams were also directed to note that Palestinians endured wars for ages and hoped one day to see Jerusalem "as the capital of their state. May Allah grant them victory!"

COMMENT: STRONG RHETORIC LIKELY TO CONTINUE UNTIL  
IT IS IN BOUTEFLIKA'S INTEREST TO SOFTEN IT  
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13. (SBU) Post contacts noted that had classes been in session, university students would "certainly have demonstrated" against Israeli actions and the U.S. veto of the Qatari proposal in the UNSC. Such demonstrations, had they occurred in Algiers, would have tested the limits of an existing ban on demonstrations in the capital under the continuing state of emergency originally issued to combat support for Islamist terrorists. Since university classes are not in session, the most likely public expression of anger will occur in what is expected to be a carefully controlled rally organized in coming days by the parties of the presidential coalition and the far-left Labor Party, according to Embassy sources. There are no indications at present to suggest that street demonstrations will be allowed anywhere in the capital. Whatever plans the government is formulating to vent popular anger, it is likely that the government will not seek to soften official rhetoric in the mosques or government media anytime soon. By having remained thus far above the fray, President Bouteflika has strategically positioned himself to temper Algerian reaction at an appropriate time of his choosing.

ERDMAN